

THE BURGLAR AND THE LADY

By Jesse Lynch Williams

ILLUSTRATIONS BY KARL ANDERSON



NATHAN selected a window which had a rug under it. He made a neat semi-circular scratch at the bottom of the upper sash, replaced the implement—a Christmas present from an old friend—in his kit, put on a pair of gloves, and gently but firmly pressed upon the glass until the segment fell in. (Now you see why he had chosen a window with a rug under it.) Then he took off his gloves (which were only useful for this one feature of the task), reached in, unbolted the latch, raised the window and, humming a little tune—in a whisper, of course—he entered the silent darkness of the house.

He knew very little about the plan of the house, being a stranger in this city. It was, of course, quite unprofessional, but do not think badly of him, for there are occasions when even burglars cannot be choosers. However amateurish it may sound, he actually knew nothing about the occupants of this house except what he had observed during the day. He had observed enough to make him know it was worth while. He had not observed enough to make him realize that it was not worth the risk. By this time Nathan had reached the dining-room.

"Ah, I see, they carry the silver up-stairs, sideboard drawers and all," Nathan observed to himself in the dark. "A good idea that." He was a critical chap.

Next the library; nothing convertible. Then the drawing-room; only a few trinkets. "I hate to go up-stairs," reflected Nathan, shaking his head in the dark. But being a man of character he softly felt his way up to the second floor. Nothing worthy of him.

"I feared as much," sighed Nathan, in bitter disappointment. Though there had been no light in the second story throughout the long evening, while he waited and watched, yet, he now confessed to himself, he had cherished secret hopes of finding the silver there. "Waited and watched"

sounds as if he had stood at the corner, or sauntering back and forth, had gazed up at the house, like a sentimental lover. Of course you understand that he had stridden by like a father of a growing family going for a doctor, or a commuter trying to catch a trolley at the next corner, and somehow he was always in a shadow when he happened to pass the policeman.

Some of you might have left in discouragement. Even Nathan, man of decision that he was, hesitated there in the darkness. For it is considered very unprofessional to ascend to high altitudes. If the second floor is twice as dangerous as the first, the third floor is four times as dangerous as the second. It is a geometric ratio. The lay mind is so woefully ignorant about these things; no high-class, self-respecting burglar carries a revolver or ascends to the third story—if he can help it. But Nathan's need was great, and the beautiful lady with the wonderful earrings, he had followed home from shopping, had turned in at this house. He ascended the stairs—without removing his rubber overshoes.

If you or I had been in his place, two, possibly three of the steps would have creaked. All were silent to Nathan's talented tread. As the delicate touch of the surgeon can detect the complexity of a fracture, as the acute mind of the lawyer can feel almost instinctively the weak spot in a witness's story, where the layman would see only strength, so can the expert in Nathan's calling feel with his mere hands the creakiness of certain stairs and skip them. But Nathan was not puffed up in his superiority. It was all in the night's work to him.

Ah, here was the top landing at last, and a few seconds of well-earned rest. It was on the third floor that he had seen the familiar effects of the lights and shadows, followed at last by sudden darkness, which meant going to bed. That was hours ago. "No such easy routine life for me," mused Nathan, rising from the top landing. "I

am a hustler. I work long after most of you are luxuriously sleeping, like fat, well-fed cattle." Yet he was not envious; had he not just finished a long régime of routine regularity in a retired country place, surrounded by plenty of congenial friends? And he had been bored with it all. This, ah, this was living again! There was the old familiar sound of long-drawn breathing. As the lashing of the angry waves is to the sailor, as the tramp of battalions marching to the front is to the born soldier, so is the delicious, because dangerous thrill of rhythmic snoring to the born burglar who loves art for art's sake.

Now for the adroit opening of the door, and pray heavens it be unlocked. It was not. He was considered an adept at this, and though a little out of practice, he found his hand had not lost its cunning—or rather both hands, for it took two hands and very steady ones. He spent six minutes at it—but he made only one very slight click, and that during the noisy ninth exhalation of the malesleeper. "Odd," thought Nathan, "the last place I ran across a snorer who made number nine his climax, I was unfortunate." But this only lent spice to his work. If it weren't for things of this kind, burglary would be mere drudgery.

Nathan had also detected the lighter breathing of a female nose. "These slender aquiline noses always do it that way," Nathan recollected, feeling possibly a bit pleased with himself for his ability to tell from her snore that she was the one he had seen with the earrings, during the afternoon. Those earrings! They were worthy of him.

Now, Nathan was as gallant as most dashing men, but in his professional capacity he did not fancy woman. It is so with all of his calling, and if you women only knew it, you would get your sisters instead of your brothers to spend the night in the house during your husband's absence. A burglar is much more afraid of nervous, easily wakened women than of mere stolid, snoring men, or even dogs. If he has the natural inborn love of animals, he can make friends with most dogs, but women will not lie still, no matter how kindly you may speak to them.

Nathan had noiselessly emptied a jewel-tray by this time. "Ah," said Nathan to the earrings, "I am glad to meet you at last.

I have admired you from a distance," he added, as he put them in his waist-coat pocket. It was a silly habit, but he always talked thus in working.

The deep breathing had continued, though once he feared the masculine snore was waning, but it was only a roll-over. The lady continued in the deep, sweet sleep of which Nathan approved.

Now, if he had only stopped there all might have been well, but Nathan sorely needed some ready cash. Why, he lacked the actual necessities of life, not to speak of railroad fare, for a man of Nathan's standing did not fancy riding on the bumpers like mere hoboos and sociologists. Nathan was something of a snob.

He tried the trousers. Left-hand side, only keys. Right-hand side: Ah, a rather fat bunch of bills. Another roll-over on the gentleman's part, followed by heavier breathing than ever. "Snore on," thought Nathan.

"Filmore! There's a man in the room!" It was the lady's voice, high and shrill, and Nathan—you won't despise him for it?—felt little icicles along his spine. Also he quietly sank to the floor and lay still as if frozen all over. Long years of professional training made him do it instinctively.

"Filmore! Filmore! wake up. There's a man in the room!" She was shaking him.

Nathan was crawling toward the door.

"There, there, dearie, you've got a nightmare." The husband tried to sound sleepy, but he only sounded tremulous. He had been awake for five minutes.

"There he is! Quick, Filmore!"

Nathan was crossing a fateful streak of street light.

"Nonsense, my dear," said her protector, and turned over snoring bravely.

Not so the weak and shrinking female. As quick as a cat, she sprang out of bed, and before Nathan could arise, she was upon his back, trying to hold him down and screaming for Filmore most inconsiderately, despite his evident desire to sleep.

It was the most unpleasant situation in all Nathan's varied career. He did not want to hurt her, but in trying to reach the door he had only kicked it shut, and now he could not get free of her long enough to get it open. Meanwhile she was screaming even louder than Filmore was snoring, and

the window was wide open. Nathan grasped her slender neck and clutched tight.

"Let go, or I'll hit you," commanded Nathan.

"Filmore, do you hear!" she gurgled. "Help, oh!" But Nathan shut her off. But still she clung on, scratching and biting like a lioness in her den. Filmore could not see that because his back was turned. He could not hear well, because he was snoring.

"Madame, I don't want to hurt you," whispered Nathan at bay, "but if you don't let go, I'll kill you."

"He's killing me, Filmore!—Oh—oh!" Again Nathan shut her off. And again she fought him fiercely.

Then Nathan—oh Nathan!—snatched one arm free and gave the lady—Nathan, Nathan!—a sharp upper cut under the chin. She staggered, still clutching him; he shook her off, he ran to the window, hoping to find a—yes, there was a soft flower-bed to jump for. But this was the third story. He hesitated. Filmore was snoring. Here came the lady, and just then the dread sound of a roundsman's whistle cut the silence. Nathan jumped. He whizzed through the air, struck a projecting grape-trestle near the ground, and presently found that he had been for some seconds in a rose-bed with a broken ankle-bone, the lady screaming overhead, and the world awl about him. Policemen were running up the street—noisily as usual. Here they came, nearer and nearer. Nathan lying in the shadow could see them. Ah, they passed the house, thanks to an echo. This gave him a chance. He could not go fast or far with one leg, but he dragged himself along the ground toward the deeper shadow of the house, under the trellis. The police were returning. Nathan could see them as he pulled himself up the porch steps. There was a hammock. Not being occupied at present, Nathan took it. "Just what I want," said he, and fainted. Some men would have tried to reach the alley and fainted there. They would have been caught. You see Nathan was a philosopher.

If he had not fainted, he would have heard Filmore's voice shouting: "Stop thief!" most stirringly, and Nathan would have enjoyed this, for he was also a humorist. But Nathan did not move.

The police cleverly located the screams and shouted up encouragement. Filmore was the spokesman from the window.

They found the burglar's tracks in the rose-bed. They looked down in the cellar, out in the alley, under the coal-bin, under the porch, but naturally not in the hammock. Who ever heard of looking for a burglar in a hammock? Quite unprecedented. Ridiculous. They spent the rest of the night searching the slums for suspicious characters.

When Nathan awoke it was broad daylight and the reminiscent sound of turning a latch was what aroused him. A servant opened a door nearby. Nathan sat up, and put his good foot on the floor. "I thought you would never come to the door," he said, irascibly; "but no matter," he added, kindly, yet regretting it was not a maid instead of a butler. Nathan needed breakfast.

"What are you doing in this hammock?"

Nathan raised his eyebrows haughtily, then condescendingly, "It was the only thing I could find," said Nathan, limping.

"I did not hear you ring," the butler added a little more respectfully somehow. "Have you met with an accident, sir?" Nathan's face was knotted in pain.

"I don't suppose it amounts to anything," said Nathan in a tone to show he forgave the butler; "but on the way down-town to the station to take an early train, I have slipped and hurt my ankle, rather severely, I fear. I took the liberty of—oh, oh, pardon me—but I believe I am going to—"

"My! you are white—Oh, Lord!"

For Nathan had fainted. At least he was tenderly carried from the hammock into the house by the butler and another servant. They were now pouring whiskey down his throat. "That is very good rye," thought Nathan, remembering how wistfully he had passed it by on the sideboard last night. He never drank during business hours.

"You are very kind," said Nathan, "but I am not accustomed to strong drink and so I fear, on my empty stomach—you see, I was about to take breakfast at the station——"

"Oh!" said a sympathetic maid, and here began Nathan's breakfast. They

had his whole story out of him before he had finished, an interesting story; he said he feared the brandy ("Brandy!" the butler winked indulgently at the coachman) had made his poor tongue run wild, and he hoped they'd pardon him. Meanwhile Nathan was planning. It was a delicate situation.

"It's given you a splendid appetite at any rate," said the sympathetic maid. Somehow, they always were sympathetic with Nathan.

"Splendid!" he said, casting his eyes fondly upon her. "Thank you, I will have another cup, since you insist. I'll venture to say you made that coffee yourself." Nathan, like Napoleon, believed in a hearty breakfast before going into action.

"And now," he said, from the fullness of his heart and stomach, "all I require to make my happiness complete is that you will convey my warm thanks to the lady of the house for her gracious hospitality, and my sincere regret that I cannot thank her in person." He spoke with the recklessness of the well-fed. "Then if you will kindly call me a carriage—a closed carriage, please; an open one might give me a cold in my ankle."

"Oh, but," returned the sympathetic maid, encouragingly, "you *can* thank Mrs. Dodge in person."

"She told me she would be out presently to see about your leg," nodded the butler.

"Ah!" said Nathan, visibly affected by this kindness. "This is too good, but I fear I cannot wait. You see the next train leaves at—"

The butler arose. "I'll tell her you are in a hurry," he said, hastening to the door.

"Pray do not disturb her on my—"

but the obliging butler had gone.

"She's only in the next room," the maid assured Nathan.

"Oh, I see," he said, reflectively.

"Talking to the police detective," the maid whispered, mysteriously.

"Indeed!" responded Nathan.

"Yes," more mysteriously, "giving him a description of the burglar!" Nathan was evidently impressed. "The burglar?" he inquired, perplexed.

"An awful thing happened here last night."

"You don't say so! In this very house?" Nathan was such a responsive listener.

"Here's the paper," said the sympathetic maid. "It tells all about it."

The butler re-entered. "Mrs. Dodge will be here in a few minutes," he announced, gladly.

"Toobad," said Nathan; "I cannot wait."

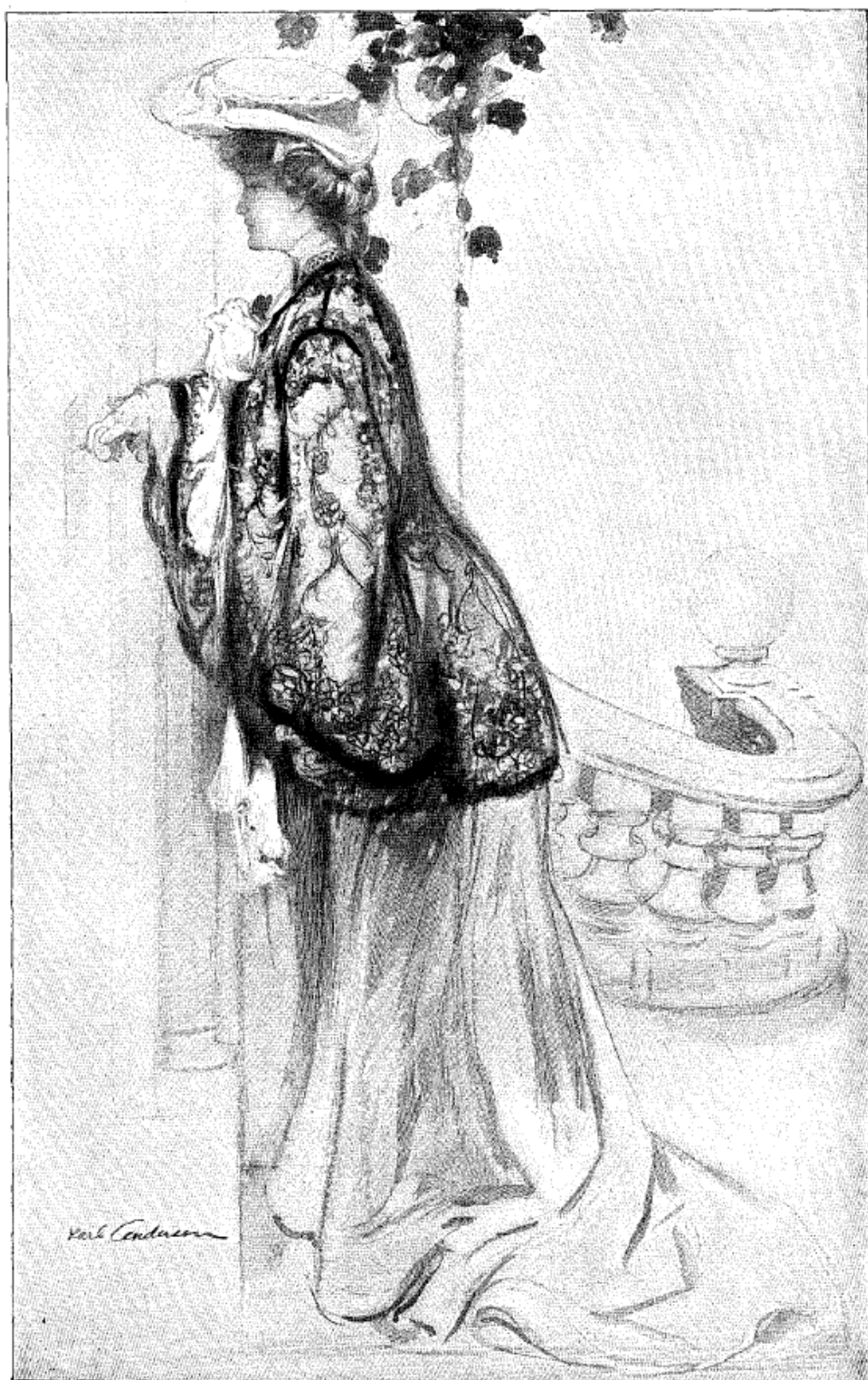
"But she told me expressly not to call your carriage till after she saw you."

Nathan saw that the butler knew his place, and Nathan knew that he could not go alone. "How good of her," he said. The situation required a different plan.

"I told her how anxious you were to thank her in person," said the butler.

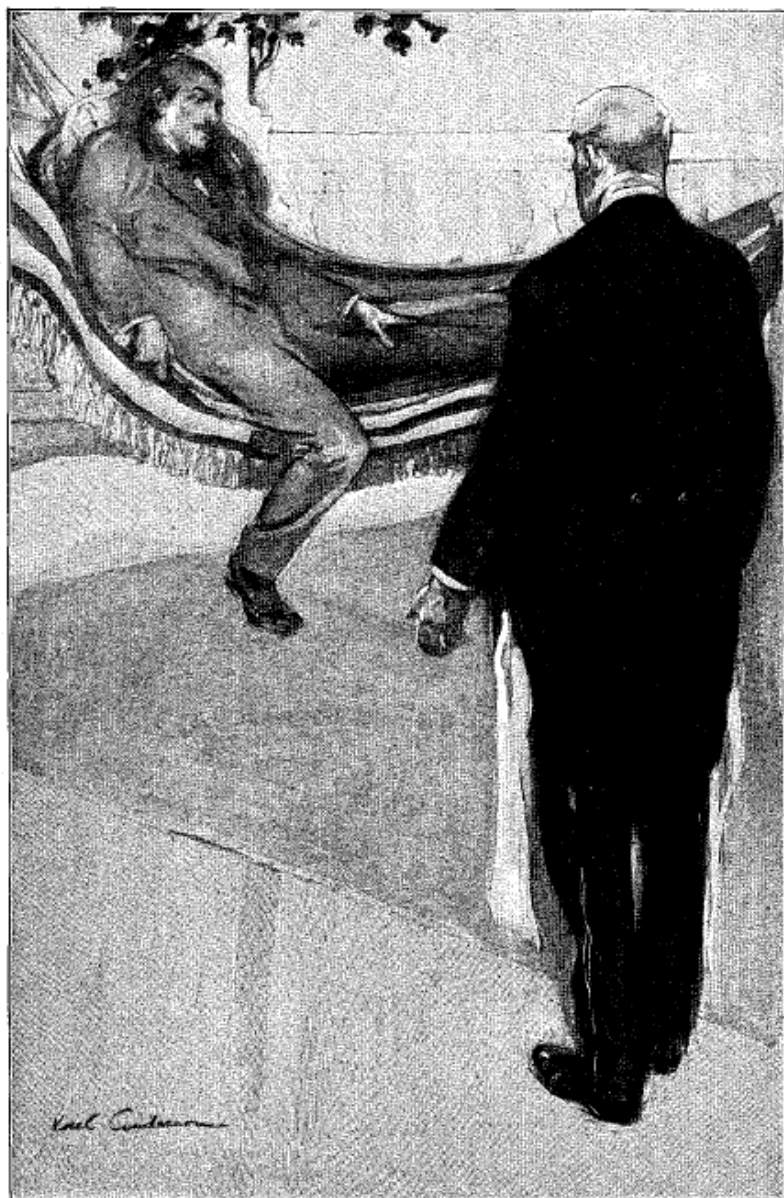
"How good of you," said Nathan; then turning to the maid, "You are all so good," he beamed. "That will do now," he said, nodding kindly at the butler. "This is very absorbing," for just then his eye was caught by large headlines over a description of a desperate hand-to-hand encounter with a bold burglar at the house of General Filmore Dodge, the well-known political leader, the Democratic candidate for mayor of the city.

The General, it appeared, was a general of militia, and a very brave man. For on being awakened by the terrified screams of his young wife, the beautiful Mrs. Helen Dodge, he was amazed to find a cowardly ruffian at her throat endeavoring to choke her. Naturally, he sprang to his feet, dealt the intruder a terrific blow, knocking him across the room; then grappled with his desperate antagonist. Finally, the General, who is a large, powerful man, and was a well-known athlete in his younger days, succeeded in overcoming his adversary, and then, with a superhuman effort, dragged him across the room to the window, opened it and "threw him out into the night," as the reporter put it. Meanwhile, the terror-stricken young wife was screaming hysterically. (Just like a woman.) These feminine cries, however, had the good effect of bringing the ever-watchful police on the dead run. The General himself, in his excitement, had not thought of calling for help until after throwing the burglar out into the night. The police made a thorough search of the premises and neighborhood, but though they found tracks where the thief had landed upon a flower-bed, "the latter was evidently unhurt, and having such a start had made good his escape."



Drawn by Karl Anderson.

The beautiful lady with the wonderful earrings had turned in at this house.—Page 173.



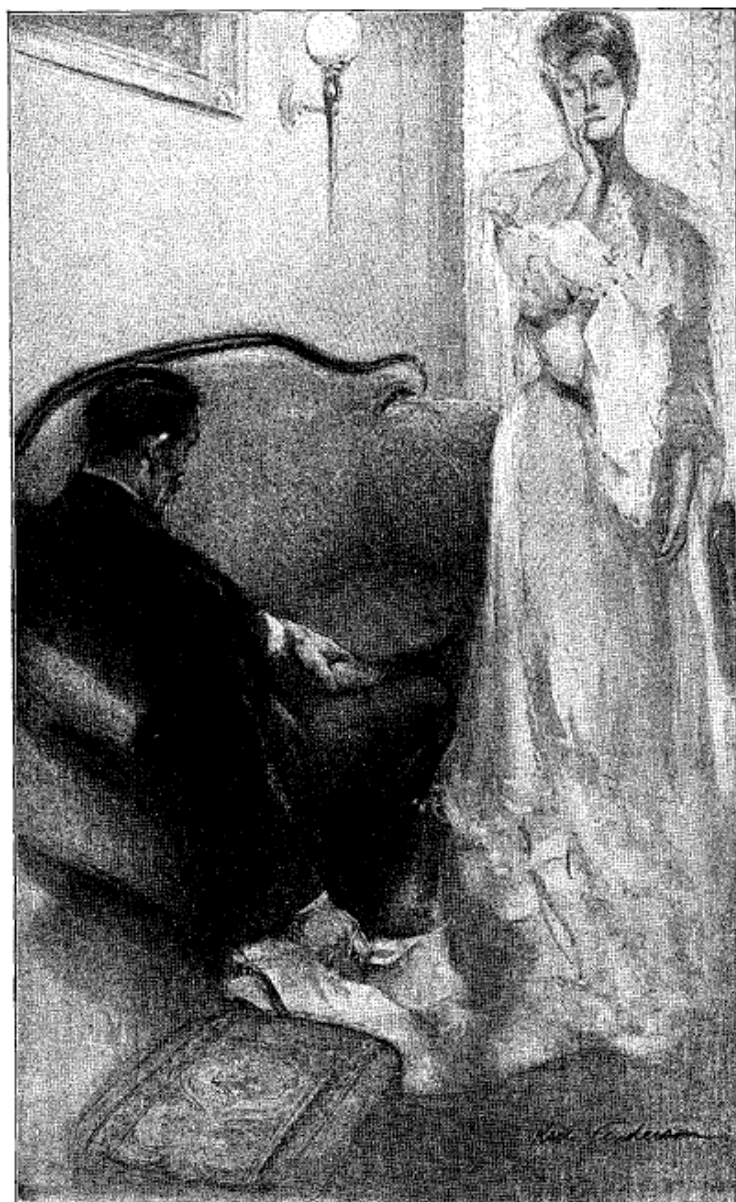
"What are you doing in this hammock?"—Page 175.

The stalwart General kindly consented to be interviewed. He said that naturally he regretted the necessity of throwing a fellow human being out of the window, for even the humblest is yet a fellow-man, "But you see, boys, when I woke up and found that cowardly ruffian choking my dear wife—well, if I had it to do over again, I suppose I would act exactly as I did last night, and I leave it to any of you if you would not, too!"

Mrs. Dodge, whose face and neck were badly bruised, was asked to make a state-

ment, but she was too much overcome by the fright to add anything to her husband's account except that her bruises were mere scratches, and that she is very thankful her husband escaped. It was stated, however, that the loss of her earrings was irreparable, as they were a family heirloom, which she prized more than the whole house. She directed police headquarters to send out descriptions to all the cities to get the jewels back at any price.

An editorial inside, entitled "Our Gal-



"There is a full account of it in the paper in your hand."—Page 182.

lant General," predicted that this episode, though small in itself, was all that had been needed to bring over the doubtful element in the party, and would assure the election of General Filmore Dodge as our next mayor.

"And yet," mused Nathan, cynical bachelor though he was, "some men do not believe in matrimony!" He was tying up his possessions—some would call them kit and swag—in the editorial sheet. It might prove necessary to lose the bundle quietly. And meanwhile he was consumed with a

wild desire to behold this woman, clothed and in her right mind.

At this point the door opened, and Nathan heard a man's voice, "Good-by, Mrs. Dodge, if the crook is still in reach, he cannot escape us—it is impossible; my men are scattered over all quarters of the city and suburbs. And as for the earrings——"

"Ah, do find the earrings," said a soft low voice that sent a thrill through Nathan, "if you have to pay double their value. Good-day, Captain. John, please show the gentleman out."

"And now," mused Nathan, as he stuck his little bundle in his pocket, "and now comes my chance." He had formed his plan. It never took Nathan long.

There stood framed in the doorway the most beautiful woman Nathan had ever seen, tall and slender and fair; a small, delicate face, with the fine aquiline nose held high. Yesterday he had only seen the earrings. To-day he beheld a woman who was not afraid, and the earrings were in his pocket.

He tried to rise to meet her, tottered, stuck out his bad leg, gasped and fell at her feet. "I wonder," thought Nathan on the floor, "if she will recognize me when I look up."

Without waiting to ring for servants, the lady leaned over and helped him up with her lithe strong arms—did not Nathan know how strong they were?—just as he had felt sure she would. His features were twisted with pain. At any rate they were twisted beyond recognition. He groaned and sank back on the sofa, covering his face with his hands.

The lady straightway pulled off Nathan's shoe and felt his ankle. "Why, there's a fracture here," she said, and touched the bell. She did not ask him if it hurt him—poor fellow. She seemed to know it did.

"It was that horse-block you tripped on? I've always said it was misplaced."

Such a lovely voice, Nathan hadn't the heart to contradict it. "Can it be possible," he thought, "that this is the same voice I so lately heard in another key?"

The butler came in answer to the bell.

"John, please telephone to St. Luke's Hospital for an ambulance, and then bring the rest of that court-plaster and a basin of water and a towel."

Nathan appreciated this, but did not fancy the idea of the ambulance. The surgeon always brought a policeman along and Nathan had no use for policemen. Moreover, they would go through his clothes at the hospital. He decided to amend his plan.

John returned with the court-plaster. She cut off several strips. John left the room. Now Nathan untwisted his face and looked up at her, almost asking with his eyes if she did not recognize him, then suddenly dropped his eyes again. She had not recognized him, but Nathan had recog-

nized his own finger-prints on that slender throat, and the burglar blushed.

"I'm sorry I hurt you," said the lady, seeing the color.

"When?" said Nathan.

"When I put on the court-plaster," said the lady.

"You didn't," mumbled Nathan, "but you might have." He seemed an ill-natured person. Oh, Nathan, Nathan! how could you! Such a little throat. But he turned it off, as men will, especially after a good meal. "Just think," he mused, as she dressed his face, "a few hours ago those soft slender fingers were trying to scratch my eyes out, and now they are washing the blood away. A few hours ago that delicate creature was sitting on my back, and now she's been filling my stomach."

The lady, meanwhile, seemed preoccupied, but determined to do her duty. "I don't see how your face was scratched so much in tripping over a horse-block."

"And I, in turn," said Nathan, with an apologetic smile, "fail to see how your face was scratched so much while a burglar was waking your husband."

The lady did not seem to crave his sympathy.

"You see I've read the paper," said Nathan.

She made no reply.

"I suppose," ventured Nathan, urbanely, "your husband is a very deep sleeper."

The lady replied, "Does your ankle pain you very much?" Nathan, unlike the butler, did not know his place.

"I trust you will not consider me presuming," said Nathan, "when I remark that the burglar ought to be ashamed of himself to hurt a lady—a lady like you."

The lady raised her eye-brows slightly, then smiled kindly and added, "But then he's only a burglar."

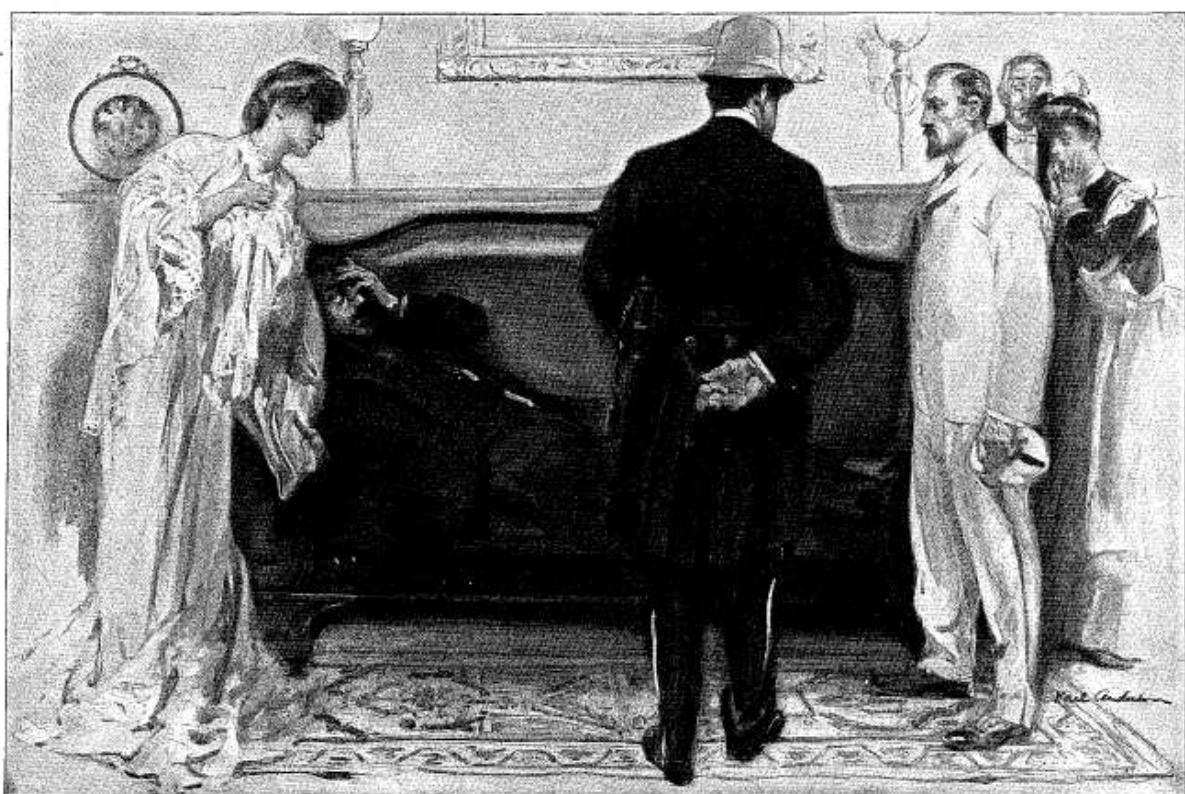
Nathan sighed, "True, too true." It was cruel to rub it in. Then he added, "But if he were lying here as I am"—the lady started—"and could see what he has done, as I do—yes, even a burglar might feel shame and remorse."

The lady was busy with the court-plaster.

"Don't you think so?" ventured Nathan.

The lady made no reply.

"Madame," Nathan inquired, sym-



Drawn by Karl Anderson.

"Thank you, Madame," said Nathan; "thank you for the newspaper."—Page 182

pathetically, "may I ask if your husband was hurt as much as you?"

"A man naturally knows how to protect himself," said the lady.

"Naturally," said Nathan; ("I thought I could make her answer me") "but a lady—a lady, I suppose, can only scream?"

"There is a full account of it in the paper in your hand," said the lady, haughtily.

"Yes," said Nathan, tapping the paper, "it says this act of bravery will win your husband's election."

The lady was looking out of the window.

"The ambulance ought to be here," she said, tersely.

"Then I must hurry," murmured Nathan, stretched out on the sofa.

"Hurry?" asked the lady, perplexed.

"Madame," said Nathan, gazing up at her eyes, "your husband must be a very brave man."

"As brave as a lion," the lady answered.

"God bless you," said Nathan.

"I beg your pardon?" asked the lady, returning her attention to him.

"For being so kind and considerate to a poor man, who, who—for being so kind and considerate, Madame."

"There now, that dressing will do till you reach the hospital," said the lady. "Here it comes."

"It?" said Nathan.

"The ambulance," said the lady. Nathan heard the bell now, coming up the street as noisily as the police last night. He hated abruptness, but there was no time to lose.

"Madame," he asked, suddenly, "are you sure you lost your earrings?" The ambulance was drawing up at the house. "Are you sure it was not all a night-mare, after all?"

The beautiful lady recoiled. She darted a sudden horrified look at his face, then at his shoes. Black earth of the flower-bed was caked upon them. The door bell rang. "How did you hurt your leg?" she hissed, fiercely, coming bravely toward him again.

Then answered Nathan, like a fool or an artist: "I said on your horse-block, but not all rose-beds are beds of roses. And not all generals are what their wives want people to think. Madame, you are the bravest woman I ever—"

The surgeon and a policeman appeared at the door.

"Here we are, ma'am," said the policeman—deferentially to the wife of the next mayor.

"Made our best time, Mrs. Dodge," smirked the ambulance surgeon—to the leader of local society.

"Officer!" shrilled the lady; her eyes were blazing; she clutched Nathan's shoulder, as if fearing another jump from the window, "this man, I've been feeding and nursing!—"

"Ow! my shoulder!" cried Nathan. He grabbed her little hand with one of his, as if in pain, and while rustling the newspaper with the other, whispered quickly, "Never fear, I won't tell on your husband if you won't tell on me." The two officials were approaching.

"This man," the lady repeated in a dazed manner, "this man, I've been feeding and nursing—is a good man—that is why I've been taking such care of him. Don't you see? And I just wanted to say, he deserves the best of care, Dr. Howe, the best of care," she repeated, nervously. They were spreading out the stretcher for Nathan.

"Thank you, Madame," said Nathan; "thank you for the newspaper." He put one hand under it as he handed the paper to her. They lifted him from the sofa.

"Any patient of yours would have the best of care, Mrs. Dodge," smirked the surgeon. "But you, Mrs. Dodge, need a little care yourself; too much excitement—for such a nervous temperament!" ("These hysterical women!" he added, under his breath.)

"Who wouldn't be excited—see what I have found!" cried the lady, joyfully. She displayed the earrings.

The stretcher-bearers stopped abruptly.

"What!" exclaimed the surgeon.

"Where, m'am?" cried the policeman.

"In the flower-bed," said the lady.

Nathan, reclining on the stretcher, was gazing at her with admiration—his last look.

"By the way, if not asking too much, Madame," he said, reaching into his pocket—was he a fool or artist?—"will you not keep this little bundle of personal possessions till I am well again? They are precious to me—gifts from one I admire."

The lady stood in the door-way with her nose held high. "Call for them when you are out of the hospital," she said.

The patient on the stretcher heaved a sentimental though satisfied sigh as the ambulance went clanging down the street.

The bundle had not been opened when he called for it. Nathan was not a fool.